

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 4, 2008

MALIBU CREEK COMMUNITY RESTORATION PROJECT

File No. 08-139
Project Manager: Kara Kemmler

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$40,000 to Santa Monica Baykeeper (SMBK) to conduct a community-based restoration project adjacent to Malibu Creek and Malibu Lagoon in the City of Malibu, Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: Malibu Creek State Park and Malibu Lagoon State Beach, City of Malibu, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Regional Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Area Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed forty thousand dollars (\$40,000) to Santa Monica Baykeeper (SMBK) to conduct a community-based restoration project adjacent to Malibu Creek and Malibu Lagoon, more particularly described in the attached staff recommendation. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, SMBK shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, budget, and schedule; the names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work; and evidence of its right to access the project sites to accomplish the purposes of this authorization.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding enhancement of coastal resources.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. SMBK is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Conservancy staff recommends that authorization of up to \$40,000 to Santa Monica Baykeeper (SMBK) to conduct a community-based restoration project adjacent to Malibu Creek and Malibu Lagoon. The community-based restoration project is designed to eradicate exotic vegetation species in an area upstream of the future larger restoration project to restore and enhance the function of the lagoon as well as to nurture community support for the larger restoration project at the lagoon.

The project involves exotic vegetation monitoring and mapping, exotic species removal in the mapped area and replacement with native plant species, and public outreach. SMBK will conduct public outreach to Malibu and the Malibu Creek Watershed communities. Outreach efforts will focus on volunteer recruitment from local middle schools and high schools, press announcements in local Malibu papers and on the local cable channels. The outreach efforts will focus on educating the public and developing enthusiasm for the larger upcoming Malibu Lagoon restoration project. Exotic vegetation removal and native species planting will be performed by volunteers recruited from the community overseen by SMBK staff. A minimum of 12 volunteer events will be conducted, occurring every other month during the project term (approximately 2 years). Each vegetation plot will be delineated and mapped using GPS and digitally photographed prior to any vegetation removal activities. All GPS data and digital photographs will be imported into a geographic information system (GIS) database and used to track restoration success.

Site Description: Malibu Creek watershed encompasses 110 square miles and is the second largest watershed draining to Santa Monica Bay. The lagoon at the terminus of the watershed is a 31 acre coastal estuary with a direct link to one of the most popular surfing beaches in Southern California hosting about 1.5 million visitors per year. The lagoon provides habitat for two federally listed endangered species, the tidewater goby and steelhead trout, hosts an abundance of avian species and is a critical stop-over for migrating birds along the Pacific flyway.

The proposed project will occur on publicly owned land in Malibu Creek State Park and Malibu Lagoon State Beach. SMBK will work cooperatively with the landowner, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), to access the site and conduct project activities.

Project History: The Conservancy has been working with the landowner, DPR, as well as its nonprofit partners which include the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM) and SMBK toward implementation of the Malibu Lagoon Restoration

and Enhancement Plan, which is a larger restoration of the lagoon that includes wetland habitat restoration, water quality improvement and enhancement of public access and recreation amenities. The Plan has two phases. Phase 1 included the relocation and redesign of the existing Malibu Lagoon State Beach parking lot to maximize available wetland habitat area for restoration in Phase 2; provide water quality benefits through the implementation of runoff treatment controls, including permeable surfaces and a low impact stormwater treatment system; and enhance existing educational and recreational uses of the site. Phase 1 was completed in April 2008. Phase 2 of the Plan involves restoration of the lagoon's ecological function through habitat restoration and enhanced water circulation within the lagoon and includes construction of public access and interpretive features to enhance the visitor's experience at the park. Phase 2 is anticipated to begin next summer.

To date, the Conservancy has provided in excess of \$1 million in Conservancy funds and approximately \$3.8 million of State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) grant funds awarded to the Conservancy for the Malibu Lagoon Restoration and Enhancement Plan. This project will help ensure the integrity of the larger restoration project by removing exotic invasive vegetation upstream as well as help revive community support and enthusiasm for the upcoming Phase 2 of the Malibu Lagoon Restoration and Enhancement Project.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$40,000</u>
Total	\$40,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, this project will help restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands and prevent degradation of coastal watersheds. The proposed project is consistent with the prioritization criteria in Proposition 84 because it will help restore the Malibu Creek watershed, which is an important landscape linkage.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION

Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) provides for the Conservancy's participation in a program of coastal resource enhancement. Consistent with Section 31251, the proposed authorization would award a grant to a nonprofit organization to enhance coastal resources that have become degraded due to invasive exotic plants and human-induced events impacting habitat and water quality. The proposed project would contribute to the enhancement of the natural and scenic character of the area and the ability of the watershed to support steelhead trout and other wildlife species.

Public Resources Code Section 31253 provides that the Conservancy "may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. . . ." As a nonprofit organization, SMBK is eligible to receive a grant from the Conservancy. Due to the limited resources of this

organization and its dependence on volunteers to implement the project, staff recommends that the Conservancy contribute 100 percent of the funds needed to carry out the project.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective B**, the proposed project will help restore and enhance coastal habitats, including coastal wetlands and stream corridors by removing exotic species and restoring native riparian habitat in the Malibu Creek watershed.

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective D**, the proposed project specifically targets the control and eradication of invasive plant species that threaten native coastal habitats by removing non-native invasive vegetation and planting native plants to restore the habitat. In addition, the program educates volunteers and public citizens about invasive species.

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective B**, the proposed project will serve to preserve and restore the northern portion of the Santa Monica Bay watershed, which is a significant coastal watershed in Southern California, by implementing a habitat restoration project that will also serve to ensure the integrity of a larger habitat restoration effort in the watershed.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support from the public:** The proposed project and the larger restoration of the Malibu Creek Watershed and Malibu Lagoon enjoy widespread community and agency support. The proposed project has the support of elected officials including Senator Sheila Kuehl, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, public agencies, including the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, State Water Resources Control Board, and community volunteers. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is in the coastal zone of the Santa Monica Mountains and will benefit stream, riparian and coastal wetland habitat.
5. **Need:** The SMBK is a nonprofit organization with limited resources and relies on volunteers for restoration efforts. Without Conservancy funding the SMBK would not be able to implement the project. The landowner, DPR, is similarly restricted in its ability to financially contribute to this project effort.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Located at the terminus of the Malibu Creek watershed, the lagoon represents an important coastal wetland resource hosting both avian and aquatic

species of important statewide and regional ecological significance, including two federally listed endangered species, the tidewater goby and steelhead trout, and it is a critical stop-over for migrating birds along the Pacific flyway.

Additional Criteria

12. **Readiness:** As the proposed project is complimentary to Phase 2 of the larger restoration project at the lagoon set to begin in summer of 2009, the timing is perfect for the proposed project. SMBK regularly engages in similar restoration efforts and as such is ready to perform the mapping work and solicit volunteers needed for the restoration effort.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy has been involved in resource protection, enhancement, and restoration projects within the Malibu Creek Watershed and is an active partner in the Malibu Lagoon Restoration and Enhancement Project. The proposed project will serve to enhance those efforts and improve habitat in the watershed.
15. **Cooperation:** SMBK will be working cooperatively with DPR as well as the larger project management team for the Malibu Lagoon Restoration and Enhancement Project during implementation of this project.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project lies within the City of Malibu's certified LCP area. This project is consistent with the Malibu Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan policies, including those that call for protection of Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) against significant disruption of habitat values (§3.8 and 3.23), prescribe natural buffer areas around parklands (§3.24), and encourage habitat restoration and invasive plant eradication to prevent soil erosion and stream siltation (§3.45) or protect and enhance habitat values (§3.25 and 3.50). Invasive plant eradication and native habitat restoration are a permitted use in an ESHA under the LCP's Local Implementation Plan. In Section 4.2 Marine and Land Resource Protection, the LUP recognizes the importance of both sensitive marine and land resources, including the terrestrial riparian, wetland and associated upland habitats. The LUP includes several policies requiring the conservation, restoration and enhancement of these important coastal resources. The proposed project would enhance habitat values in the Malibu Creek watershed.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15333 because it will affect an area of less than five acres to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife, and (a) there will be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065; (b) there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and (c) the project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. Data collection activities that do not cause a major environmental disturbance are also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CCR Section 15306.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.